

R e n d e r i n g r e a l i t y

graphic design
as a medium for
communicating
personal
experience

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日本人論

[nihonjinron]

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in brief

I wish to understand the world around me. Understanding at its core, for me, is to experience. To be able to try and relate, to places, emotions, people. Practice imagination and make-believe to be able to create worlds, truths alongside the truths of others. To feel empathy.

Witness the whole, sense smallest details such as scents, energies and atmospheres, the sort of IRL micro data that is near to impossible to gain from screens, books, magazines or photos. No rumors, no interpretation, no promoting, no drama. No choice of words, no lost in translation, no articulation, no tone of voice. No framing, no curating. No filter, no noise. No need

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to impress, convince or entertain. Simply exist in the time and place, with the world surrounding. Your very own subjective, conditioned, contemporary, site- & time-specific experience - something or anything to base your past and future knowledge on.

(Excerpt from personal notes)

In this thesis work I will be exploring personal experience as an artistic research process of self-initiated graphic design practice. I base my thesis on the time spent in Japan during 2014-2015 concluding to an exhibition project called 日本人論, *Nihonjinron*, literally translated as theory or writings of the Japanese (Japanese-English dictionary, *jisho.org*). In the description of the project I rewind back to where I started, flip through my notes, conversations, chats, photos, sketches and other documented memoirs from the period to form a narrative of the artistic research, compiling a review of the decisions leading to the exhibition.

Within the limits of a bachelor's thesis, I will not be able to present profound theoretical analysis but rather point out the links to the related theory and research methods among other fields of study. In this thesis I use auto-ethnography, narrative and a phenomenological approach as my method for writing and research. The research, as well as the nature of the project is highly focused on personal experience, thus, a subjective, first person point of view is unavoidable.

I made a decision to write my thesis work in English, which is not my native language. Despite the change of error, I figured I need the practice considering my

subsequent studies and ambitions in improving my writing abilities in English.

In the project I aim to use the vocational competence of a graphic designer in pursue of making sense and communicating my interpretation of a cultural experience to a concrete form for general observation and afterthoughts. Along with this thesis I present the phases of the project and base my seemingly intuitive artistic research process on theoretical framework. Could an experience be communicated to an audience with the means of graphic design?

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The first time I visited Japan was in 2012. I followed my current boyfriend around for 10 days; through complicated subway routes to hazy back alleys and on to small stone padded paths in blooming temple gardens. I got dazzled, excited and calm at the same time, and filled with questions. I was anticipated for realizing that there would not be enough time to have it all, to understand anything really. I felt the urge to know more and for that to happen I needed to spend more time.

As a visitor it is easy to be blinded by the neon lights and not be able to look in the shadows. I wanted a clear sight. I wanted to see the flip side too. I got in to a design project that took me back a couple of years later. At the time of my second visit I was already waiting for an answer for an exchange program. Six months later I packed my bag and move to Japan.

—

I arrive in Japan on 1st of September 2014 for the third time. I enter a country I had briefly visited twice before, an island with no borders to another country, surrounded by the ocean. I enter a culture with a history dating back to the beginning of times and beyond, reflecting to the western conception of time I am coming from. In fascination to enter this unknown, this time to stay, I arrive with my mind open to all influence, eager to learn and understand where I am. I feel relieved to be out of my comfort-zone, ready to embrace being a clueless *gaijin* (foreigner in Japanese). After spending some time in Tokyo, I arrive in Kyoto 10 days later, where I am due to settle down for my exchange semester. I spend the first weeks finding an apartment, strolling around town with a bike, visiting the university; learning to cope with my current surroundings. I am on the verge of all things new, and I am loving it.

I' m here.

*I' m here for selfish, curious reasons. I
want to know where I am.*

*A local girl in my school asks me if I
feel lonely. I haven' t had time to feel*

*lonely. I' m comfortably lost. I live here
even though my home is far away. I don' t
understand the language, but slowly I learn.
I don' t know anyone, but I meet people all
the time. I don' t know how to pronounce
nor memorize train stations, but I rather
bike anyway. I like to get lost and find my
way, search and research.*

(Excerpt from personal notes)

I begin my studies in Kyoto Seika University's Graphic Design department with an appointment, where I meet my professor for the first time for picking classes for the upcoming semester. The professor speaks mainly in Japanese, understanding some English but feeling uncomfortable to speak, so I have a person from the international student office with me to translate. Both members of the faculty seem nice and laid back, not anything like I was expecting from the brutal working culture with it' s intense hierarchy I had heard of. My professor is wearing a patterned bright-colored Hawaiian type of shirt with matching mono-color long sleeve under it - on a daily basis, as it later occurs to me. He is laughing a lot, making fun of my appearance, which makes me feel welcome and relaxed. Coming from Finnish standards I am not used to dealing with strict hierarchy anyway, neither am I familiar with the delicate nuances of local polite manners in addressing a person with higher age or status. I do notice a delicate change of tone between the two male faculty members speaking in Japanese, but at that state I can not make much analysis on it.

The meeting goes well, apart from the fact where I

am told I can't take any classes outside of graphic design. This is disappointing, since in my application I had emphasized how I was particularly looking for experimenting with disciplines out of graphic design. The university offers interesting courses in various fields, having their own faculties for popular culture, humanities and manga. I end up taking obligatory graphic design courses on poster design, promotional design and self-initiated design along with a *shodô* class (Japanese calligraphy). In addition, I am offered to attend a private Japanese language class every week. I feel slightly disappointed, but decide not to care.

The difference was not simply one of appearance. East and West could not agree on character and symbolism either. The West saw the unicorn as fierce and aggressive. Hence a horn one meter long. Moreover, according to Leonardo Da Vinci, the only way to catch a unicorn was to snare it's passions. A young virgin is set down in front of it and the beast is so overcome with desire that it forgets to attack, and instead rests its head on the lap of the maiden. The significance of the horn is not easily missed.

The Chinese unicorn, on the other hand, is a sacred animal of portent. It ranks along with the dragon, the phoenix, and the tortoise as one of the Four Auspicious Creatures, and merits the highest status amongst the Three-Hundred-Sixty-Five Land Animals. Extremely gentle in temperament,

*it treads with such care that even the
smallest living thing is unharmed, and
eats no growing herbs but only withered
grass. It lives a thousand years, and the
visitation of a unicorn herald the birth of
a great sage.*

(Murakami 1985, 96)

The first assignment on the graphic design course turns out to be a challenge. All students are assigned to create a poster concerning Japanese society. For the assignment they have planned two field trips, an overnight stay in a small, isolated island of Kamishima with a fisher village and a nature observance route, and another visit to an art residency for Down syndrome people in the countryside of Mie prefecture.

I feel overwhelmed by the assignment. Creating a critical poster of a society I have entered past month is not exactly a dream brief. I get anxious over it at first, but after talking openly about my concern to my professor and going over it again and again in my head, I am left with no other option than to complete the assignment from the position I am at. The fear of ignorance is highly present as I realize I'm lacking knowledge on about every aspect of the culture, decades of history and thousands of *kanji* (chinese characters used in Japanese writing system together with *hiragana* and *katakana*) just to name a few. I feel merely paralyzed to be expected to act on a plausible presentation in just a few weeks, but I was left with no other option. They tell me they want me to share my view.

The research to be done is massive. I feel sure

motivated to figure out the society, yet I have to give myself a reality check and acknowledge my position. My conception on the topic would without a doubt be subjective, filtered with my personal experience and prejudice, dependent on the crumbs of knowledge I happen to be able to gain by the deadline; incomplete knowledge and assumptions with a haze of prejudice and personal proposals based on insufficient information. But they want me to share my view.

He digs his heel into the ground again.

"I repeat what I said at the very beginning: this place is wrong. I know it. More than ever. The problem is, the Town is perfectly wrong. Every last thing is skewed, so that the total distortion is seamless. It's a whole. Like this " My shadow draws a circle on the ground with his boot.

"The town is sealed," he states, "like this. That's why the longer you stay in here, the more you get to thinking that things are normal. You begin to doubt your judgement. You get what I'm saying?"

"Yes, I've felt that myself. I get so confused. Sometimes it seems I'm the cause of a lot of trouble."

"It's not that way at all," says my shadow, scratching a meandering pattern next to the circle. We're the ones who are right. They're the ones who are wrong, absolutely. You have to believe that, while you still have the strength to believe. Or else the Town will swallow you, mind and all."

"But how can we be absolutely right? What could their being absolutely wrong mean? And without memory to measure things against, how could I ever know?"

My shadow shakes his head. "Look at it this way. The Town seems to contain everything it needs to sustain itself in perpetual peace and security. The order of things remains perfectly constant, no matter what happens. But a world of perpetual motion is theoretically impossible. There has to be a trick. The system must take in and let out somewhere."

"And have you discovered where that is?"

"No, not yet. As said, I' m still working on it. I need more details."

(Murakami 1985, 247)

The people I study with are adorable and welcoming, and on average around 8 years younger. Everyone speaks very poor English, if any. Can' t blame them, my current Japanese skills are not to brag about. Apart from the field trips, I don' t spend too much time with my classmates out of campus. I long for equal, comprehensible conversation.

I begin to take independent experimental field studies by attending a variety of events and activities outside the campus. I attend contact improvisation classes. I learn a great deal about local music and performing arts scene and go to see shows and gigs on a regular basis. I participate in traditional tea ceremonies and take a few lessons to learn the craft. I hike mountains and visit game arcades, friend' s houses, temples, museums,

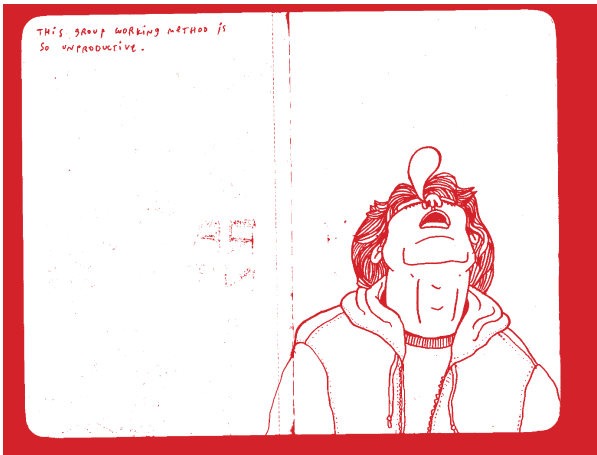
galleries and places. I slowly learn the language, how to read and write and talk. I eat and drink things I had never heard of, take cooking classes and learn the names of never-seen vegetables from farmer grannies over lunch. I ride my bike and skateboard around. I bath in *onsens* (public baths) and sing karaoke until the dawn, just to name a few.

I carry a sketchbook on me at all times. I take notes on my phone, typing words, recording soundscapes and shooting video and photos. I pick a habit of sketching on blank postcards while commuting. Mostly I draw people on the subway and local trains, where the benches were arranged on the sides of the carriage to face each other (and to hold in as many people standing up as possible).

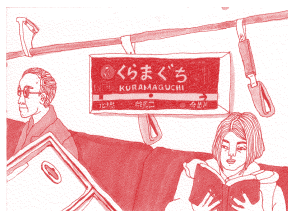
I get to meet a great deal of interesting people and even make some good friends. Every now and then I end up



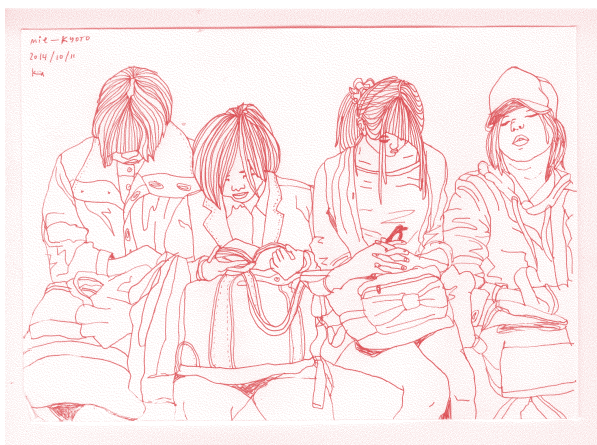
a. sketch



b. sketch



c. sketch



d. sketch

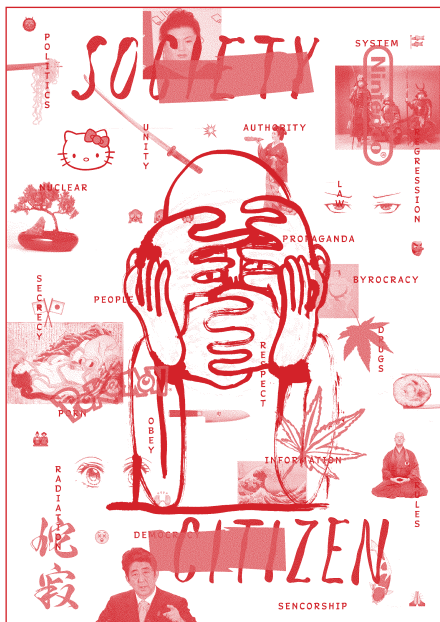
collaborating with my new acquaintance in their affairs; I start co-hosting an English conversation class for artists and get involved with an eco workshop for local university students.

I joke around and shit-chat a lot, but I also discuss serious things. I ask a lot of stupid questions and receive a great deal of silent information, between-the-lines content about work, gender, social issues, history, politics, art, love and crime. I learn about problems under the surface. I learn about the people who behave well, but who are burning inside. Every now and then I can sense the emotion - frustration, oppression, passion and anticipation - behind the façade, but most of the time there is a cultural and lingual barrier in the communication, that I just fail to pass.

There are now six old men; the hole is waist deep. One old man is in the hole, wielding a pick at the hard bottom with astounding efficiency. The four men with

shovels toss out the dirt, and the last member of the team carts the dirt downhill with a wheelbarrow. I cannot concern a leader among them. All work equally hard, no one gives orders, no one assigns tasks. Something about the hole begins to disturb me. It is far too large for waste disposal. And why dig now, in the gathering blizzard? They apparently dig for some purpose, even though the hole will be completely filled with snow by tomorrow morning.
(Murakami 1985, 316)

The journey from the briefing of the first school



a. 1st draft of the poster



b. final poster

assignment to the final critique session was eventful, but I managed to pull out a presentation that I am fairly satisfied with. Having witnessed multiple discussions on social matters and sensed the oppression under the political decision-making I decided to work with that. Since the latest nuclear accident in Fukushima power plants in 2011, people have become more aware, more active and more empowered to speak up, yet there is no cultural approval to do so. Thus, all the rant about the state of things is more than often left inside walls, in the confidential conversations around coffee tables private cars and tiny living rooms. At the critique session I present a poster work with an illustrated character on it. The character has 3 pairs of hands used for shutting its mouth, ears and eyes (referring to the pictorial maxim of the *three wise monkeys*, originating from Japan). The character's eyes are peeking from between its fingers. The poster is colored and composed to assimilate the Japanese flag and there is a text in Japanese saying *seifu no saru*, a government's monkey. I tell my teacher how I try to comment on the habit of silencing the public when it comes down to difficult issues, such as the politics of the country. I explain, with the help of a translator, that I want to provoke the young generation to not keep their thoughts to themselves, but to speak out while facing injustice. There is some discussion around the work in the class. The professor explains to me, referring to the history of violence and war, that Japan is committed to work as a nation for maintaining peace and harmony, by any means possible.

That poster is the first piece I complete for my upcoming exhibition, even though I am not aware of it at the

time.

"Tell me, what is the hole for?" I ask the colonel.

"Nothing at all," he says, guiding a spoonful of soup to his mouth. "They dig for the sake of digging. So in that sense, it is a very pure hole.

"I don't understand."

"It is simple enough. They dig their hole because they want to dig. Nothing more or less."

I think about the pure hole and all it might mean.

"They dig holes from time to time," the Colonel explains. "It is propably for them what chess is for me. It has no special meaning, does not transport them anywhere. All of us dig our own pure holes. We have nothing to achieve by our activities, nowhere to get to. Is there not something marvelous about this? We hurt no one and no one gets hurt. No victory, no defeat."

"I think I understand."

The old officer finishes one last spoonful of soup.

"Perhaps you do not understand. But our way is proper to us. It is proper, peaceful and pure. Soon enough, it will begin to make sense to you."

(Murakami 1985, 317)

Overall, the first semester passes quickly. I have finally adapted to life in Kyoto and feel at home. Surely I have had my struggles with authorities and relationships, and

faced times of homesickness too. It's like a pattern; every time I have to say goodbye to someone visiting, or a friend leaving, I go through a day of mundane I refer to as *sayonara hangover* (goodbye hangover). But all in all, life is good. While the other exchange students are preparing for heading home it is time for me to apply for extension for my studies. From what I have discussed with the faculty in both Aalto and Seika beforehand, continuing my studies for another semester would basically be just a matter of procedure. I have received permission and letter of recommendation from my university and I am about to go through with the formalities in Seika. I get invited to a meeting with my professor to discuss the matter, and am about to experience my first actual cultural conflict.

I have just biked to school up the mountainside like I do every day. I am sweating, still slightly out of breath when I get politely asked to enter the meeting room. I sense a strain in the atmosphere. I keep trying to control the perspiration with a tiny towel and a hand fan while being told I could not be continuing my studies with my class for another semester.

Asking for reasons for their decision, I get to hear pretentious excuses in an extremely serious tone. I feel defenseless. I don't have a clue what is going on. Trying to reveal the true issue behind the verdict, I get told highly personal accusations on how I have failed in socializing with my classmates and how I am not embracing my opportunity of being in here. My professor basically tells me I have not shown enough effort in certain, obviously predetermined matters. Matters I am not aware that I was expected from. Obviously, my professor is not aware of my life outside

the campus area, and hasn't shown any interest to find out. I am holding back my emotions trying to politely communicate my frustration and seek for guidance to the options I have left as they have clearly made up their mind. I am told I could still apply to another course if I wanted to, and thus I decide to leave an application to the video and media art course.

"For many years, I led the life of a soldier. I do not regret that; it was a fine life. The smell of gunsmoke and blood., the flash of sabers, the call of the bugle. I sometimes still think about the drama. Yet I cannot recall what it was that sent us into the fray. Honor? Patriotism? A thirst for combat? Hatred? I can only guess. You are fearful now of losing your mind, as I once feared myself. Let me say, however, that to relinquish your self carries no shame," the Colonel brakes off and searches the air for words. "Lay down your mind and peace will come. A peace deeper than anything you have known."
(Murakami 1985, 317)

It turns out the conflict is a lucky strike for my exchange studies. I get accepted in the video & media art course, where I meet with new, supportive faculty. I am able to experiment with sound, video and editing and begin to attend lectures on experimental film history in Japanese. I feel encouraged and enthusiastic. After the first semester of orientation to the society I am now fully comfortable with focusing on my studies, feeling productive and at ease. I come up with ideas

for projects, one of them being a desire to hold an exhibition. I am planning for a group exhibition to invite some other critical minded local artists and students, but contacting and organizing it all independently feels too uncertain, exhausting and time consuming. As I am still looking for gallery space by the end of the semester, I decide to do it anyway, going solo.

I end up booking an affordable gallery space for five days from an art hub called Social Kitchen. When I come to think about it, Social Kitchen had been a vague intersection of my life in Kyoto all along. I went there to see a performance on the first week I had arrived in town. It is the venue for my friend's English conversation class that I had been involved with. They also serve great vegetarian lunch at the café downstairs, where I have had language exchange sessions over lunch with another friend, a girl working there. Withal, the main reason for encountering the place so often throughout my stay is because it was located right in my neighborhood, just a few blocks down from my local grocery store. It felt like home already.

By the time I have booked the gallery space I still have no idea on what I am about to exhibit. Having considered multiple issues all along the problem is not so much in the lack of subjects to discuss than the abundance. The contradiction of rising will in activism, feminism, self-expression and freedom of speech while retaining the hassle-free, safe and good mannered impression. Working like maniacs and falling asleep any time, any place. The cuteness overload and the obvious propaganda hidden in it. Hi-tech everything, bullet trains and

robotics alongside with ancient cultural history, hiring people for the jobs of traffic signs and old school state offices full of printed paperwork. The love for nature and ecological lifestyle meeting the hyper-consumption of material and resources. The escapism, the humbleness, the depression, the pride. The extremes of this nation.

The space is not enormous, but I am obliged to produce enough content to be able to pull it off. Thus, instead of a fixed idea or single theme I decide to make it a work-in-process type of outcome, where I could - but am not required to - use all the subjects and material I have been processing on during my stay. With more than enough to discuss, I decide to create an installation piece with multiple layers and mediums in it.

"I have been thinking it over...", I dredge up the words. "I'm not going."

The shadow looks at me blankly.

"Forgive me," I tell my shadow. "I know full well what staying here means. I understand it makes perfect sense to return to our former world, the two of us together, like you say. But I can't bring myself to leave."

The shadow thrusts both hands in his pockets. "What are you talking about? What was this promise that we made, that we'd escape from here? Why did I have you carry me here all this way? I knew it, it's the woman."

"Of course, she is part of it," I say.

"Part, thought not all. I have discovered something that involves me here more than I

*ever could have thought. I must stay.”
My shadow sighs, then looks again
heavenward.*

*“You found her mind, did you? And now you
want to live in the Woods with her. You
want to drive me away, is that it?”*

*“No that is not it at all, not all of it,”
I say. “I have discovered the reason the
Town exists.”*

*“I don’ t want to know,” he says,
“because I already know. You created this
Town. You made everything here. The Wall,
the River, the Woods, the Library, the
Gate, everything. Even this Pool. I’ ve
known all along.”*

“Then why did you not tell me sooner?”

*“Because you’ d only have left me here
like this. Because your rightful world is
there outside.” My shadow sits down in the
snow and shakes his head from side to side.*

“But you won’ t listen, will you?”

*“I have responsibilities,” I say. “I
cannot forsake the people and places and
things I have created. I know I do you a
terrible wrong. And yes, perhaps I wrong
myself, too. But I must see out of the
consequences of my doings. This is my world.
The Wall is here to hold me in, the River
flows through me, the smoke is me burning. I
must know why.”*

(Murakami 1985, 398)

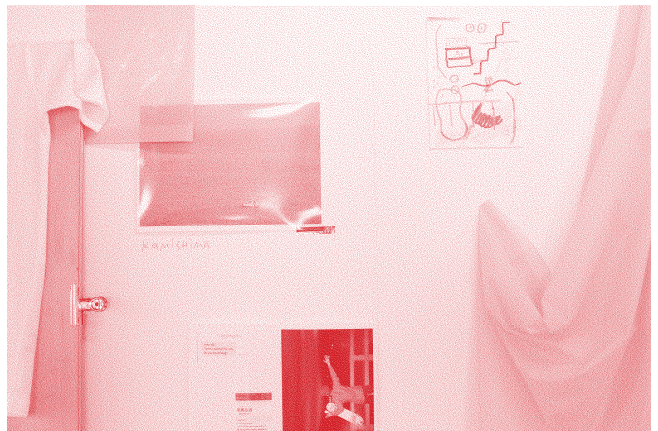
As I start going through my notes on the matters I
feel the need to discuss further and collecting the
material I have already produced I come up with a

somewhat paradoxal approach for the show about Japanese culture. In the gallery space, I will lay out a one room composition of illustration, photography, posters, material, objects, painting, texts and video. The work will be concerning esthetics, mastering craft, detail orientation, working culture, superstition, consumerism, environmental issues, political anxiety & fundamental strive for maintaining order, manners and discipline - the ingredients of Japanese society and what I had figured out of it.

On the walls I hang selected illustrations, photographs, screenshots of conversations along with various materials and objects relating to the subjects at hand. I produce a collection of large scale prints of zoomed in details from poor quality phone photos to represent the twisted idea of focusing on details, restrained from seeing the whole. I paint images and lettering on the walls and some of the objects. I install a few sculptural pieces; a small shop display of random objects with tags of various life essentials, a blown out kitchen scene of inflammable political ingredients, a plastic wrapped piece from a month of not refusing to accept plastic bags and a zen-area with my personal futon and a tea ceremony arrangement. In the middle of the room I set up a couch with a table for chips bowls and a laptop for working even while not at work. On the wall in front of the working/ chilling/ living room setup I project my main piece; a music video about conflict and problem avoidance though the means of escapism [The Dead Stones - Tell me (mutual abuse)]. I print out a small edition of zines for purchase, combining some of the photo and illustration works from the installation.

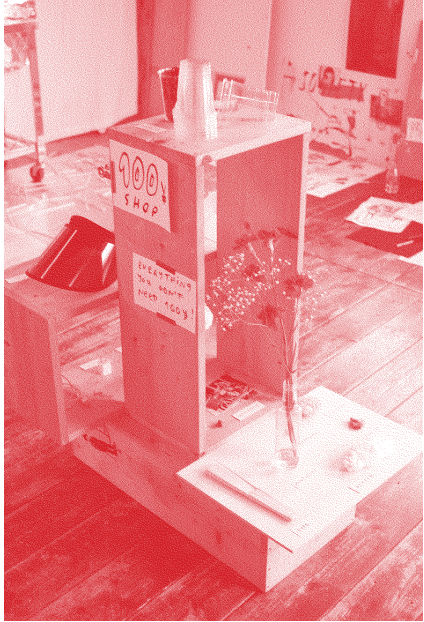
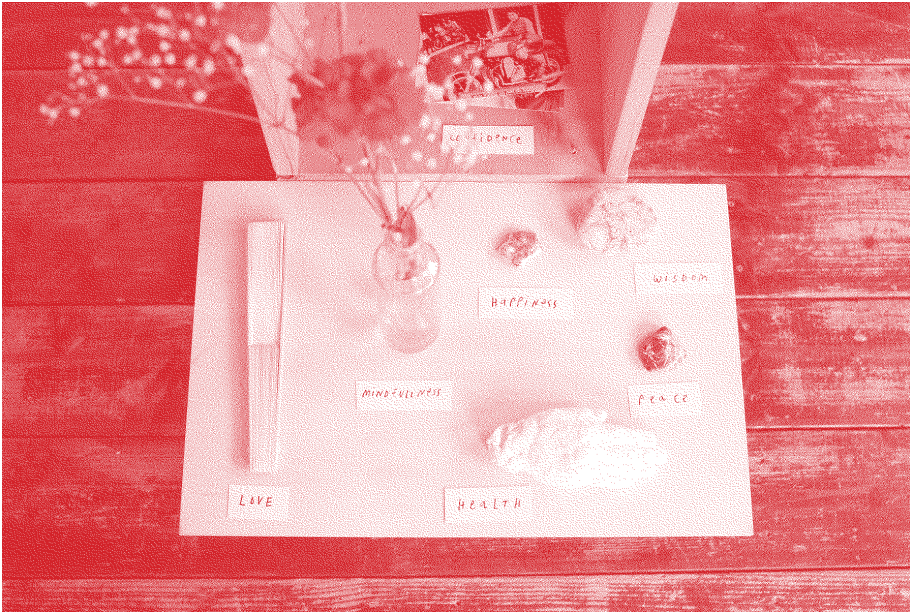
I end up naming the show 日本人論, *Nihonjinron*, which literally stands for theories or discussions about the Japanese. According to Wikipedia, it is *a genre of texts that focus on issues of Japanese national and cultural identity and how Japan and the Japanese should be understood* (Wikipedia, *Nihonjinron*). In the press release I described the show as a *MULTI—MIXED—MEDIA—ART—WORK—STUDY—COLLAGE—INSTALLATION—PROCESS—EXHIBITION of the process of an attempt on trying to figure out Japan over a year*. I literally move everything I own in to the gallery space, apart from my wardrobe and some essentials, and most of the visitors keep asking if I actually sleep there. I could, though. The space turns out to be not merely a representation of the stuff that has been on my mind and notebooks, but also a representation of my private space. Citing a message on the guest book, *this performance looks like your brain*.

As the final celebration, I decide to hold a combined opening, closing and farewell party at the venue day before taking the exhibition down and packing up to leave Kyoto.



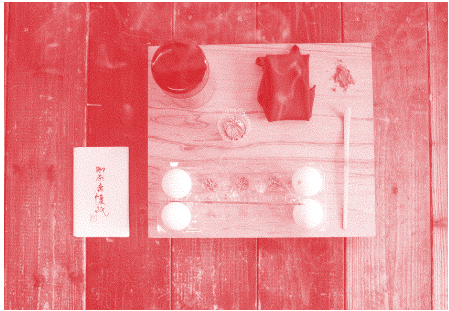












experience in
theory

If it weren' t for the exhibition, my stay in Japan would probably have turned out to be just another exchange experience in a foreign country: searching for and gaining essential information for coping with life in a foreign country. However, applying critical thinking and personal consideration on my experience-based knowledge and setting the outcome under the public gaze, turned the preceding experience in to a process of artistic research.

The seemingly intuitive means of my research practice maintain

cross-disciplinary characteristics. Similar methods of approaching research subject are found within the fields of social sciences (anthropology), philosophy (phenomenology, ontology) as well as psychology (narrative). The process can be referred to ethnographic research, aiming to describe a certain way of life based on fieldwork (Peacock 1986, 19). Adding elements from autobiography, I end up using auto-ethnography as my method; describing and analyzing personal experience by the means of graphic design in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, *Autoethnography: An Overview*). The seemingly intuitive research process of qualitative research based on narrative provides a dynamic approach to understanding human identity and the process of making sense of our ever-changing world. *Our personal and social identity is shaped around the stories we tell ourselves and tell each other about lives. Through detailed analyses of these narratives we can begin to understand our changing identities and our ways of interpreting the world. Narrative psychology provides not only a framework for understanding but also for challenging the nature of ourselves and of our worlds.* (Murray 2003, 110)

Throughout my stay I was aware of the diverse positions I was coming from; being a North European, middle-class family raised art student in their thirties I was probably not your average expert on Japanese culture. I was looking at things from my subjective viewpoint, being constantly filtered with my cultural and social background, my sex and my age as well as the strange, new position of my self-claimed otherness, to only mention a few. This also led me to criticize my own conclusions; who's truth am I seeing but my own? How can I make conclusions based on my personal

experience? All the knowledge I gained would, in a way, be imaginary. On the other hand, how could the world be observed any other way? In Sociological Imagination, C. Wright Mills advises to consider the conditions in imagination, and behaving according to those conditions. *At it's core, imagination itself is nothing more than the willingness and ability to alternate perspectives.* (Hannula, Suoranta, Vaden 2014, 12)

Within my thesis project I approached graphic design as self-initiated, non-verbal communication; producing, choosing and arranging graphic content in the space (medium) to convey an idea (Hollis 1986, 7). With the project I wish to take part in the canon suggesting new ways and means for modern day designer authorship evolving from the artist's books towards wider representations (Rock, *Designer as author*).

In their book *Designer as...*, Steven McCarthy states that *design authorship may be self-initiated, lacking a conventional client, but that does not mean it lacks an audience. Instead of being reactive, it is proactive.* In graphic design, considered as an initial factor of visual communication, the message transferred is never solely dependent on the sender. The interpretation of visual work is unavoidably affected by subjective interpretation and surrounding impulses (e.g. culture, politics, time & place of existence) of the designer as well as their audience, the conditions of conditions. *The doubling is intended to highlight the fact that the conditions are themselves conditioned, which means that they are always contested, actualized, reinpreted and so on. Taking the situation and site as something means actualizing one set of conditions and challenging, changing others and messing with the conditions of the conditions.* (Hannula,

Good communication skills are key to success in life, work and relationships, states a website called *Essential Life Skills*. Referring to the ideology they share, good communication profoundly seeks for a consensus. However, visual nor verbal, communication doesn't necessarily need to lead to consensus, for *goodness* sake. A designer can also suggest, consider, argue and provoke. *The assumption that design needs a client is a common fallacy. Design needs content and design needs users (readers, a market, an audience, etc.) but the message content – – – can equally come from the designer.* (McCarthy 2013, 95)

communicating
experience

I have always found it difficult to learn (and act for that matter) by the book. As long as I do not have personal experience or contact with my subject, my view remains blurry, distant, strange, difficult to understand - somewhat irrelevant. No guidebook, advisory or recommendation will do. There is an urge to explore, to see for yourself. With all there is, all that is ugly and all that is fair, all that is highly interesting and deeply irrelevant.

By experience only I am able to gain a solid basis to start building knowledge on. I can start piling bricks of data, gathering other' s experiences to reflect with my own.

I can begin to reveal issues I have been too blind or stupid to see before, but that I can now at least relate to. Non-documented reality, life as it happens. Is it not closest to the truth one can reach? After all it is knowledge in it's purest form, all I know now, my personal experience.

(Excerpt from personal notes)

Throughout the study, I often got asked on my opinion about Japan. Usually it was just small talk, but there were situations, where I wish I could take the conversation deeper. Too often the conversation collapsed in to a language barrier.

Nihonjinron as project was a way, an attempt, for me to communicate within the conditions I was currently at. According to the feedback I received, the local audience seemed to be able to look at their everyday from a different perspective, as many of the foreigners found prospects to assimilate with.

In this thesis I wanted to discuss how graphic design, being the practice of producing, choosing and arranging graphic content on a medium to convey an idea (Hollis 1994, 7) could be used to communicate a personal experience. In graphic design, considered as an initial factor in visual communication, the message transferred is never solely dependent on the sender. The interpretation of visual work is unavoidably affected by subjective interpretation and surrounding impulses (e.g. culture, politics, time & place of existence) of the designer as well as their audience.

I found it useful to look back at the experience and

consider the influence it has had on my (professional) identity. I found confidence in my artistic research methods and the way I approach design, work and life in general. I came to realize that there is a great deal of potential and value in perspective and experience-based knowledge, that every living creature holds access to a perspective that no other does. That perspective is valid in all its faultiness, as long as it is kept honest, conditioned and open for discussion. Personal perspective should never be referred to as the only truth, but a truth. Subjective approach is as unavoidable as it is inevitable in creations of both artistic and scientific work, and life in general.

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